



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



"Strive to enter heaven through the narrow gate." Luke 13: 24



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me

Body of Christ, save me

Blood of Christ, inebriate me

Water from the side of Christ, wash me

Passion of Christ, strengthen me

O good Jesus, hear me

Within your wounds hide me

Let me never be separated from you.

Defend me from the malicious enemy.

In the hour of my death call me

And bid me come unto you

That I may praise you with your saints.

Forever and ever.

Amen

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Jesus concludes his catechism on salvation that began on the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.
- ▶ Jesus sets forth his prescription for Christian discipleship.
- ▶ The liturgy strengthens us, exhorts us and challenges us to cooperate with the salvation Christ has already won for us.
- ▶ This liturgy is a reminder that we are called to participate in the suffering of Christ—in the Paschal Mystery of Christ—for the sake of the Gospel. In so doing we participate in the ongoing redemption of the world.
- ▶ We have been given a solemn trust. The liturgy gives us what we need to live up to that trust.
- ▶ The liturgy is the ultimate ongoing sacrament of salvation. Sins are forgiven and we participate in the banquet that is taking place in the here and now as well as the banquet that is taking place in heaven. It is a rehearsal if you will for the day we will join in that eternal banquet.
- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Isaiah 66 18:21

- ▶ The Book of Isaiah was written in three segments by varied authors.
- ▶ The author of Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55; @6th c. B.C.E.) was writing to a people in the throes of Babylonian captivity.
- ▶ Third Isaiah was written after the exile. It was prophetic and apocalyptic.
- ▶ Third Isaiah looked forward to a future, peace-filled Jerusalem—a Jerusalem in which the lion would feast with the lamb. The author spoke of a restored Jerusalem-- a new heaven and a new earth.
- ▶ In Third Isaiah's *end of days* all would know the righteous from the unrighteous and all people would be gathered from the far ends of the earth.
- ▶ A faithful remnant would take God's word out to the world in order to gather all people together in God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that the lion and lamb feast at the same table? What are the implications for Christian discipleship?
- ▶ We are living in the last days Isaiah was talking about. How do we reconcile the fact that the lion and lamb are not feasting at the same table—peace is as illusive as it has always been? If Jesus came to usher in those last days, where is the peace we were promised? How is a Christian supposed to respond to that question?
- ▶ Where do you find the promised peace of Isaiah? Where have you experienced the lion feasting with the lamb in your life?
- ▶ In what way are you living up to Isaiah’s hope for a faithful remnant who will take the word of God out to all the nations? How do you take the word of God out in your little corner of the world? In what way might you grow in that responsibility?

Second Reading: Hebrews 12, 5-7; 11-13

- ▶ The Christians who were the intended audience of this reading were trying to cope with the reality that Jesus’ return was not as soon as they once thought.
- ▶ The people were getting frustrated, discouraged and lackadaisical.
- ▶ Today’s reading is a catechism on the implications of what is referred to as *Christian discipline*—that is, the suffering, persecutions and apathy Christians often endure.
- ▶ Christians are not only disciplined as individual believers, they are also disciplined as a community of believers.
- ▶ Such discipline is a sign of God’s love for his people. “God chastises those he loves!” It is a form of purification and sanctification.
- ▶ The pericope (section of reading) reminds the reader that suffering is necessary for growth. Much like a bush needs to be pruned for growth to occur, so too does the disciple need to be pruned for spiritual growth to occur. Such suffering is not a punishment; it is discipline.
- ▶ The theology of Hebrews asserts that suffering is to be understood as a prescription for growth, not punishment for wrongdoing.
- ▶ A study of culture bears out this principle. Many cultures have rites of passage that include the person going through some prescribed ritual in order to experience some form of pain, struggle, challenge or difficulty—a test of adulthood so to speak.

- ▶ Previous chapters in Luke's Gospel used athletic imagery to typify this rite of passage. Today's Gospel uses different imagery. Today's imagery is the journey—the road to God. Once a person has arrived, the pain is understood as transitory, much like the pain of labor before childbirth.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, do you relate to the concept of suffering as discipline?
- ▶ How and why do parents discipline their children? What does it accomplish in them? How and why does God discipline us?
- ▶ Even though Jesus put to rest the notion that sickness and suffering come to us as punishment for sin, we nevertheless are disciplined through such situations—we learn and we grow. Most of the time human beings are responsible for the situations in the first place. Have you ever felt or made the statement, “What did I do to deserve this?” What does this reading have to teach us about that statement?
- ▶ Have you ever been disciplined by God?
- ▶ In what way is a community disciplined by God?

Gospel: Luke 13, 22-30

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus' message today is vital and it is pressing. We know he is on the way to Jerusalem. We know what takes place in Jerusalem. Things are coming to a head; fulfillment is close at hand.
- ▶ Jesus uses the last leg of this journey to complete the education of his disciples.
- ▶ God's plan of salvation is coming to fruition in Jerusalem through the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Luke understands that Jerusalem is the locus of God's saving work—it is a pivotal place.

- ▶ Luke uses the journey metaphor not only as the vehicle for getting Jesus, his disciples, and the story-line to Jerusalem, but also as an allusion to the Christian life.
- ▶ The journey motif illustrates what lies at the heart of the kingdom of God that Christ came to establish. **The journey itself forms and transforms.** Living in the kingdom of God is a life-long encounter with the peaks and valleys of faithful discipleship.
- ▶ The kingdom of God itself is parabolic—that is, it surprises us and invites us into the unexpected—a world where miracles are commonplace and our *normal* expectations are stretched beyond the limits of normal—a place where the king is a pauper and a virgin gives birth. A place where the lowly are exalted and the rich are sent empty away.
- ▶ The reign of God challenges us to see with God’s eyes, not with society’s eyes.
- ▶ It is a place where the self-righteous who think they are first, end up last. It is a place where entrance is not guaranteed.
- ▶ The people of Israel believed that in the last days/messianic reign all Israelites would be saved. The wealth of other nations would be given to Israel.
- ▶ The Israelites believed themselves to be the privileged “few”.
- ▶ Those who were unsaved (the many) included Gentiles, tax collectors, the unclean and sinners.
- ▶ Jesus turned their belief upside down and insisted that membership in the kingdom was not for the privileged, self righteous few. The self-righteous had lost their zeal and if not careful were in danger of losing the very salvation they were certain was theirs by virtue of their status as God’s *chosen*.
- ▶ Jesus was speaking even to those who had followed him and offered him hospitality in their homes along the way. His message is clear. Even if they knew Jesus and had walked with him, unless they yielded to a complete conversion of heart, they too could lose the salvation they were so sure was theirs.
- ▶ Jesus was calling for everyone to repent and for complete and total metanoia.
- ▶ Invitation to the banquet table of the messianic reign was only for those who were repentant and who completely turned their lives and hearts toward God.
- ▶ Privilege, power, status and religious superiority did not assure admission. Sinners, foreigners and the unclean would be welcomed before the self-righteous. No wonder the latter sought Jesus’ death.
- ▶ Jesus’ journey and message is becoming increasingly tense and urgent. Previously he warned the folks that adherence to the *Way* might even alienate them from family members. This week he is warning them that even followers of Jesus (they themselves) could lose their *Way* if not careful.
- ▶ The bottom line for Jesus? “Are you with me or not?”



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What does it mean to you when it is said that “the journey itself forms and transforms”? How would you describe your transformation on this Christian journey?
- ▶ In this kingdom of surprises such as pauper kings and virgin births, what has surprised you the most about the Christian life? What have you least expected?
- ▶ Jesus is calling for urgent repentance, in what way is he speaking to you at this time in your life?
- ▶ How do you feel about his challenge even to seemingly faithful followers? What are the implications for us today?
- ▶ Jesus had very little time for self-righteous arrogance and for a sense of Christian entitlement. In what way is that evident in Christian communities today? What attitude rears its ugly head in communities that Jesus would put in the category of self-righteous?
- ▶ What does this Gospel ask of us—what does it challenge us to do?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session

OR

PRAYER FOR GRACE

O MY GOD and MY ALL, in your goodness and mercy, grant that
before I die I may regain all the graces which I have lost
through my carelessness and folly.

Permit me to attain the holiness and perfection to which
you desired to lead me, and which I failed by
my unfaithfulness to reach.

Mercifully grant also that others regain the graces which
they have lost through my fault. This I humbly beg through the intercession of
of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen.

APPENDIX

#1. Jesus promised that when two or more are gathered in his name the peace of Christ would be present. The lion and lamb do feast at the same table in the kingdom of God. When two or more are gathered in Christ's name and living the Gospel he preached and the reign he came to establish the lion and lamb can do no less than feast at the same table. Thus, those of us who are disciples in this last age are living Christ's promise of peace. We have a responsibility to promote peace and justice in our world. Thus, where Christians are living as true disciples, the promises Jesus made are true.

A few years ago my former parish was embroiled in a controversy. People formed camps and feuds ensued. Worshipping together was very uncomfortable. The pastor challenged the participants of the feud to come together in mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. Peace was hard won, but the people involved called upon their Christian faith and yielded to Christ's call to love and forgive one another. The lions feasted with the lambs and those who were embroiled in the feud extended the olive branch of forgiveness. Christ's kingdom of peace was restored.

#2. I have been disciplined by God throughout my life, especially through the suffering in my life. God did not cause the illness of my child, but through it I have been challenged to grow in faith and trust—to let God be God. Another example comes to mind. At times an excessive desire for material things has gotten in the way of my relationship with God. No sooner is that an issue than something creeps into my finances to remind me that I am called to live a simple life and to detach as much as possible from those things. God uses the events in our lives to teach us and discipline us—to prune us and remind us what our focus should be.

God disciplines our communities as well. We are presently under a microscope. I believe we are being challenged under the leadership of Pope Benedict to repent of the sins that have taken place within our own house. We are being reminded that we as a church are called to repent, clean house and reform and transform the people of God to more fully be the Body of Christ in the world.

#3. I am thankful that Jesus extends the invitation to us regular church-goers. It is very easy to think that since we give so much of our time to this endeavor we call Church that we are a shoe-in. A friend of mine shared how her father-in-law has given millions to the church thinking it is his ticket to heaven. His life, however, is a sad testament to a man who believed he was better than everyone else, who refused to love his family, who refused to take care of his wife in her old age and who will die a bitter old man. While it is easy to point at such folks as an example of who Jesus was speaking to in today's Gospel, it is just as easy for "us" to become lackadaisical, complacent and judgmental as we continue our Christian journey. Jesus' challenge is for all of us. Conversion, conversion, conversion is the cry of this Gospel. If we do not heed his urgent plea we risk being left out in the cold.

I have absolutely no patience for self-righteous religious people who lord over their superior religiosity over those who they think are less than they are. However, I risk a similar condemnation by my judgment of them. I must leave their souls in the hand of God and worry about my own. I am called to turn my life over to God's care—that and kingdom living consume all my time and attention.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Eschatology
Cross and Paschal Mystery
Kingdom of God
Sin

Salvation
Sacrament of Reconciliation
Sacraments
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

ESCHATOLOGY (last things, heaven, hell and purgatory)

The first reading looks to the future kingdom of God. Jesus teaches his disciples about the kingdom here and the kingdom yet to come. He teaches them about salvation—who will be saved and who will be left behind. Today is an opportune time to consider what the Church teaches about ESCHATOLOGY.

PASCHAL MYSTERY

Today's liturgy invites us deeply into the mystery of Christian suffering. Jesus invites us deeply into his Paschal Mystery as a requisite for entrance into the kingdom of God. Christians participate in the kingdom of God when they embrace the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is the repentance and conversion of which Jesus speaks in today's Gospel. Thus, today our doctrinal focus will be the PASCHAL MYSTERY OF JESUS CHRIST.

SIN

Today's liturgy is an invitation to repent. Jesus tells us that salvation is not a sure thing unless we repent and change our hearts. IN order to fully repent we must have an appreciation of the nature of sin and that from which we must repent in the first place. Thus, the focus of our extended doctrinal session will be SIN.

SALVATION

Today's liturgy is a clarion call to reflect on the salvation that is ours through the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus is urgent in his call to repent, insisting that salvation can be lost unless one repents and converts one's life. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SALVATION.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Today's liturgy is a call to repentance, the Church offers of fountain of grace in which we encounter Christ's forgiveness and reconciliation. The sacrament of reconciliation offers us the opportunity to do what Jesus asks of us in today's Gospel—repent. Thus, today we will focus our extended doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of reconciliation.

SACRAMENTS

Today's liturgy is a catechism on salvation. The sacraments provide for us the means to cooperate with Christ's saving grace. We are strengthen through the sacraments to do what Jesus calls on us to do in today's Gospel—repent and convert our lives. Thus, today we will focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today's liturgy is a catechism on what it means to live in the kingdom of God. It is an opportune time to reflect on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.